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Fatally Masculine Gender Performativity: The Overreacher's Gendered Downfall Across Marlowe's Tamburlaine I and II

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In the late 1580s, Christopher Marlowe completed *Tamburlaine the Great Part I,* the tale of a Scythian shepherd who sheds his civilian heritage for a life of gore, glory, and masculine military conquest. Though based on a real figure, Marlowe makes Tamburlaine his own, and to great success. Audiences reveled in the hypermasculine, blood-filled excitement of Tamburlaine's wrath and his amusing treatment of his enemies, many of whom he would have shared with an early modern English audience. The initial play's popularity begged a sequel, *Tamburlaine the Great Part II,* wherein this god-like conqueror adorns the position of widower, father, and dying man. Though he must evolve with these roles, Tamburlaine nevertheless spends the majority of his stage presence modeling masculinity to an audience that "may have taken the plays as a form of education for themselves—a course in advanced theoretical manliness" (Williams 56). In *Tamburlaine I* and *Tamburlaine II,* masculinity is understood to be best expressed through acts of military violence, as said acts prove it to be physically embodied and absolute. Tamburlaine himself routinely conflates his blood with masculinity and masculinity with militarism, such that the three form a constant feedback loop that serves to actualize itself. Tamburlaine speaks confidently of himself and his spreading domination, assuming himself to be the pinnacle of masculinity while also asserting his presence as an absolute force, strong enough to be and also to challenge God(s). Yet, despite this confidence and absolution that the play's protagonist relishes in, early modern conceptions of the body and of gender were known to

waver. This instability is two-fold—theories of the body wavered not just in the fact that these modes of thinking about embodiment changed rapidly during the late 1500s, but in respect to the actual physical body, as early moderns believed it to be incredibly malleable and subject to change from outside forces.[1] These unstable understandings of the body in turn complicate Tamburlaine's rhetoric; if masculinity is situated in the body, and the body is not absolute, how can masculinity be? Ultimately, militant masculinity is never as stable, sustainable, nor admirable as Tamburlaine thinks it to be, and in fact, this very hypermasculinity is what induces this overreacher's downfall and demise.

Fluid Bodies Then and Now

It is difficult to adequately summarize and/or simplify the relationship between body, sex, and gender in a way that accounts for the myriad of concurrent and often conflicting schools of thought, each of which frame these concepts in unique ways. Even within the last few decades, popular and scholarly understandings of gender and sex have evolved and continue to do so, as influenced by science, feminism, and queer theory. In his text *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud,* Thomas Laqueur provides an ample history of sex and gender, despite the burden. Unfortunately, Laqueur often focuses on European and Western theories in ways that arguably overlook the impact of Asian, African, and other non-Western contexts of thought. Nevertheless, for the purpose of understanding early modern English ideas of sex, gender, and the body, his work is invaluable. Namely, he provides a nuanced description of an early modern conception of sexed bodies, dubbed the one-sex model, which theorized a genital morphology

[1] For example, the early modern concept of the "grotesque body," wherein "the stress is parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (Bahktin 26).

based on heat. He also locates the cultural implications that come with said theoretical model. In the first chapter of *Gender, Power and Privilege in Early Modern Europe,* Jessica Munns and Penny Richards turn to Frances E. Dolan for a comprehensive breakdown of gender and sexuality in early modern England. Dolan synthesizes the work of a number of scholars, including Laqueur. She provides a thoughtful and comprehensive description of his work with the one-sex model, and even adapts it to the work she, Munn, and Richards aim to fully realize. She states:

> Thomas Laqueur energized discussion of the early modern body by drawing attention to the persistence of a 'one-sex' (or Aristotelian) model of the body, in which penis and vagina are relatable homologically, and the clitoris is a morphological penis on the outside of the body. On this model, male and female bodies are only slightly different from one another; they are on a continuum, which begins with the internal genitalia of women and then progresses, through greater warmth and dryness, to the external genitalia of men. Here biological sexual difference is a matter of degree rather than kind. What would the cultural consequences of such a view be? Laqueur himself argues that so subtle a sex difference could not ground a system of gender difference; the burden fell on culture to create and maintain a gender system. (Dolan 13-14)

The implication that a person could feasibly change their sexual organs has implications for how sex and gender are theorized by early moderns, namely ones that invoke anxiety in the gender binarist. Fluidity of bodies is a recurrent motif in early modern studies; humoral theory, which suggests that a person's health and emotions are contingent upon the balance of four "humors," or vital bodily fluids, also theorizes a permeable body, open to suggestion. These humors were associated with temperature as well: "men as a sex were hotter and drier than women," according

to humoral theorist Gail Kern Paster (13). This intersects with the one-sex model in interesting ways. As mentioned in *Making Sex*, the presence of the phallus was thought to be dictated by temperature, such that hotter and drier bodies were granted penises, and that hotter and drier bodies were *also* considered optimal for physical aggression. It is crucial to keep in mind that while humoralism was indeed symbolic in many ways, it was an actual pseudo-medical means of understanding the body and its many mysteries.

Just as Dolan infers from her engagement with the text, Laqueur concludes that points of contingency between the body, mind, and metaphorical are near inseparable, and thus, all of these facets must be discussed in congruence with one another to best understand the conception of gender in early modern England. Put simply, cultural norms were key for dictating gender presentation. To prove this in more specific and grounded means, Dolan also applies it in respect to theatre. She ponders:

> Was the process by which a boy became a woman one not of switching genders but of complexly layering visual signals for gender? How are we to understand the relationship between cross-dressing and status impersonation—on which the stage, in constant and flagrant transgression of sumptuary laws, relied? Were boys who played men as much in drag as those who played women? Few, however, dispute that most who attended the theatre accepted the idea that gender, status, and age were identified by attributes that were imitable and transferrable. (Dolan 9)

Early modern playgoers as described above support Dolan and Laqueur's claims that gender was quite malleable and socially informed. Though tempting to assume that sixteenth and seventeenth century understandings of anatomy and gender are primitive and impossible to map onto recent musings on the same subjects, Laqueur's research interprets the one-sex model to

achieve a similar end as contemporary ideas of anatomy—humans fundamentally experience our bodies through cultural expectations, manifesting as social norms and individual gender performances. He muses that "mind and body are so intimately bound that conception can be understood as having an idea, and the body is like an actor on a stage, ready to take on the roles assigned it by culture" (Laqueur 61). He seems to draw inspiration for this assertion (and even the language he uses to describe it) from the publication of another theorist that emerges concurrently: Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity within *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

The comparison of humans to actors in regard to gender is a major focus of Butler's *Gender Trouble.* In this revolutionary text, the prominent gender theorist examines what she believes to be the outdated schema that is gender binarism. Despite the cultural inclination to view gender and/or sex as an inherent truth for both individual humans as well as our collective society, modern gender theory proclaims that gender is learned, socialized, and constructed. Dolan states that "work in the last twenty years has made it possible to begin to think about the early modern body as historically constructed, just like the gender identities it wears;" in foregrounding this, she alludes to the fact that despite centuries of cultural evolution, experiences of sex and gender could be fluid in *Tamburlaine I* and *II* (Dolan 12). Contemporary notions of gender and sex aim to disrupt the concept of a binary and propose that the distinctions between male and female, man and woman, are not only less infallible than said categories (in that both exist as spectrums), but also suggest that the very act of categorization itself should be interrogated. Butler takes the established idea that gender is constructed and socialized even further by arguing gender is also performed. In her rhetoric, Butler makes the crucial step of distinguishing the mental and embodied aspects of gender, asserting that gender is largely

derived from cultural conceptions, a claim that disjoins the often-conflated ideas of gender and sex and disrupts the narrative of a natural, biological, or inherent quality to gender. Butler details the sociocultural climate that imposes gender onto bodies, and parses out the implications of this:

> If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of 'men' will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that 'women' will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that gender ought also to remain as two. (Butler 6)

As Butler states, these concepts are far from inherent truths, and thus are subject to skepticism. Condensed to its essence, Butler's argument can be interpreted to mean that a man isn't made by his genitalia, but rather a series of repeated actions (including body language, speech, and clothing) that serve to leave the impression that he is a man. Under this assumption, it is a constant stream of acts in accordance with dominant social norms that construct and support his manhood. Though it may seem that the individual is inciting the performance, Butler argues that the opposite is true. The performance is what makes the individual, and it is also beyond their control. Butler borrows from Nietzsche to claim that the focus is less on the performer than it is on the performance, adapting his speech to say that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). Her work on gender performativity is paramount to modern conceptions of gender, specifically when she details the crucial role repetition plays in upholding

gender performance. Near the end of the text, Butler summarizes her most essential statements. She clarifies and reminds her readers that:

> As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated.* This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this 'action' is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame—an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate a subject. (Butler 140)

Similarly to how repetition reaffirms gender and all of its social implications, Butler reaffirms the importance of repetition by again returning to her former points about how gender performativity is somewhat cyclical in nature (in that performing gender both creates it, but also can only occur if there is indeed something to mimic, thus becoming the very phenomena it mimics). She continues to build upon this point, or rather, decides to locate it within a larger picture to form the crux of her argument:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts.* The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler 140)

This proves to be a useful modern way to theorize gender, but its value isn't necessarily limited by era. Although the specifics of gender and sex have evolved with epistemological knowledge and scientific advancements, there are certain aspects of Butlerian gendered identity that can be retroactively applied to *Tamburlaine I* and *II.* Butler asserts identity, gendered or otherwise, to be contingent upon repetition; it is through trackable patterns that humans perform and signal their gender and personality. Despite the fact that *Tamburlaine I* was written approximately four centuries prior, Tamburlaine too operates under a similar dogma of repeated acts to communicate manhood. Anachronistically, the early modern Englishman Christopher Marlowe either consciously or accidentally anticipates that the formula for affirming gender and power is routine, consistency, and panoptic impositions upon oneself and one's peers. Furthermore, as proven in *Making Sex*, the distinction between male and female in the early modern period was flimsy—a mere few degrees in temperature dictated the presence of the penis, and thus made the phallus a risky locus for one's masculinity. As a result, Tamburlaine is forced not only to define and subsequently embody *his own* definition of manhood, but also to ground it in more performative means. For him, masculinity is located within a man's blood more so than his genitalia, and it is actualized through repeated acts of violence and domination.

Becoming the Overreacher: Violence as an Exercise in Gendered Repetition

Marlowe writes Tamburlaine as a siege of masculine militarism, self-proclaimed "scourge and wrath of God / The only fear and terror in the world," a figure that approaches near inhuman levels of excess (Part I, 3.3.44-45). Tamburlaine situates his masculinity within his unquenchable blood lust, such that he conflates his conqueror mentality with his experience of manhood. The Scythian shepherd has a lot to prove in *Tamburlaine the Great,* namely that he is indeed deserving of such a title as "The Great." In his article "'Tamburlaine' and the Body,"

renaissance scholar Mark Thornton Burnett applies the early modern concept of the classical/grotesque[2] body dichotomy to *Tamburlaine I* and *II.* He argues "that 'classical' and 'grotesque' notions of the body are thematized in *Tamburlaine the Great,* that dominance in the play is inscribed through the body and that the body is a site of contestation and disagreement" (Burnett 32). Much akin to how gender is performed through speech, dress, and body language, *Tamburlaine I* displays how class is also understood in embodied means, some of which intersect with masculinity. "I am a lord, for so my deeds shall prove, / And yet a shepherd by my parentage." (Part I, 1.2.34-35). Tamburlaine states this to Zenocrate in an attempt to convince her of his importance and worthiness, particularly over that of Zenocrate's fiancé, the King of Arabia. To scale the class chasm between a shepherd and a king is an insurmountable feat, and it is a testament to Tamburlaine's ambition that he even endeavors to do so *and* is somewhat successful. He takes care to foreground that it is his "deeds"[3] that matter, implying that at least in his case, class status is malleable; though born into a humble life, Tamburlaine has transcended societal expectation and assumed a large amount of power as well as loyal followers by adopting a concentration in militarism. Perhaps he attempts to model himself after similarly militarized figures (such as lords and kings), but it is more likely that he aims to be even better than them. Tamburlaine constantly attempts outdo his competition, besting Persians, Turks, and Egyptians alike in combat. He settles into a glorious routine: invade, taunt the present ruler(s), overthrow, pillage, and humiliate/punish the now overthrown ruler(s), who are often soon to be dead. Tamburlaine convinces crowds that these incredible feats of dominance come naturally to him,

[2] Burnett turns to Bakhtin as well as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White to aid his discussion of the grotesque/classical body and the impact it has on the early modern period as well as *Tamburlaine I* and *II.* While the grotesque body was said to be open, unfinished, with substances passing in and out of it often, the classical body is unchanging, closed off, and complete. All it produces (in relation to digestion and fornication) is quickly hidden or moderated. Naturally, the classical was said to be ideal and the grotesque to be undesirably base.

[3] "Deeds" could refer to either his acts of military violence, the way he conducts himself in regards to clothing, culture, and women, or a mixture of the two.

and in doing so implies a certain logical order in his defiance of class that is in fact more proper than abiding class rules; simply put, it would be a waste for someone of his quality to live as a mere shepherd, so much so that the only proper thing to do is *transcend* that class boundary. He alludes to this when he continues to try and win Zenocrate's favor, as he describes why they should have a future together:

> But, lady, this fair face and heavenly hue
> Must grace his bed that conquers Asia
> And means to be a terror to the world,
> By east and west as Phoebus doth his course.
> Lie here ye weeds that I disdain to wear!
> [*He removes his shepherd's clothing to reveal his armour beneath*]
> This complete armour and this curtle-axe
> Are adjuncts more beseeming Tamburlaine. (Part I, 1.2.36-43)

In this passage, Tamburlaine references his desire for a beautiful woman and to conquer Asia in nearly the same breath. Zenocrate *must* grace his bed—he's conquering Asia, and in this moment, seems to assume he either deserves her, has the strength to conquer her too, or both. His inclination to frame himself in such a way is motivated by a hypermasculinity that prioritizes possession and violence. The removal of his peasant clothes is a blend of the embodied and the metaphoric; he is referencing an internal transformation, but he *externalizes* it through clothing. Much like expressions of gender, expressions of class begin within the mind and soul and are actualized through bodily actions and presentation. He confirms this again, and again, and again.

In no way are any of Tamburlaine's victories flukes; he proves time and time again that his army can and will usurp, always in means that serve to belittle the conquered man's masculinity and bolster his. A particularly potent example is his treatment of Bajazeth, whom he

dethrones, cages, and even uses as a footstool (Part I, 4.2). The act of making a once powerful ruler into an embodied piece of furniture is a fascinating instance in which Tamburlaine again challenges hierarchies by disrupting the physical human body—he torments his foes by literally making them beneath him, an inhuman object on which to rest his human feet. In the following act, Tamburlaine ruminates on himself, attempting to consolidate his love for Zenocrate with his prowess as a man. He expresses concern:

> But how unseemingly is it for my sex,
> My discipline of arms and chivalry,
> My nature and the terror of my name,
> To harbor thoughts effeminate and faint! (Part 1, 5.2.11-114)

This passage is paramount for understanding Tamburlaine's ideologies of manhood—his sex is synonymous with his status as a conqueror, so much so that the mere experience of love (even a normative, heterosexual, misogynistic expression of it) is a detriment to his masculinity. Tamburlaine is pressured to employ certain mental gymnastics, which the footnotes within *Christopher Marlowe: Four Plays* explicate:

> though it may be 'unseemingly' for great warriors like himself to be affected by love, it is also inevitable, since the soul of man is properly stirred by the prompting ('instinct') of beauty … he is able both to conceive of [incursions to beauty] in his soul *and* subdue [them] … despite his low birth, his 'virtue' (i.e. his power and self-command as a warrior) is the noblest attribute of men. (Gibbons 86)

To assuage his anxiety at even the *slightest* expression of softness[4], Tamburlaine must convince himself that said expression of softness in fact bolsters his warriorship and manhood—it is a somewhat ridiculous fear, and only serves to illuminate just how conditional and tedious his expressions of masculinity are. Though he appears inherently impenetrable to his army and his foes, Tamburlaine spends a concentrated amount of time and effort reaffirming his own soldierhood/masculinity. Burnett also comments on the futility of Tamburlaine's quest for status, elaborating that "the paradox of *Tamburlaine*, though, is that its protagonist is inescapably of the 'low' by birth and that his origins eventually begin to reassert themselves" (Burnett 36).

This rise and fall that Burnett references is influenced by Tamburlaine's inclination to the title of "overreacher." Simply put, an overreacher is a figure that challenges the boundaries of logic and culture in an active effort for either glory or power. Marlowe's writing is very familiar with the concept, and Tamburlaine is an excellent addition to what could be described as "the canon of overreachers." Through *Part I* and *Part II,* Tamburlaine constantly strives to best his enemies and even himself; he is a full-throttle man, with little regards for questions of limits or ethics. He challenges sacred figures, burning religious texts and concluding:

> Well, soldiers, Mahomet remains in hell—
>
> He cannot hear the voice of Tamburlaine.
>
> Seek out another godhead to adore,

[4] Which, again, is marginal at best. Tamburlaine's relationship with Zenocrate is as much conqueror/conquered as it is husband/wife. He fears a slip-up in power and/or masculinity, despite the fact that his courting of her boils down to him prostrating war as a mating dance—he constantly strives to own, protect, or impress her by killing others and taking lands, as seen in his interactions with her homeland, her father, and the virgins of Damascus.

The God that sits in heaven, if any god,

For he is God alone, and none but he. (Part II, 5.1.195-200)

Though this brash blasphemy may contribute to his downfall depending on one's reading, it does not change the fact that Tamburlaine still believes himself powerful enough to do it.[5] He makes morally problematic decisions to protect his own values and status. His entire personality is informed by his need to be extravagantly militarized and masculine; although this brings him fame, glory, and a wife, the sheer excess he exudes serves to dethrone him just as easily as it empowered him. Burnett best summarizes the trajectory of Tamburlaine's overreaches across the play, stating "Part One charts Tamburlaine's rise to the 'classical,' but Part Two dramatizes the 'grotesque' claiming him once more" (Burnett 36). Indeed, the sequel to *Tamburlaine the Great* is an authorial liberty on Marlowe's part; a complete deviation from the historical figure that the protagonist is based on, *Part II* builds upon and revises theories of embodied masculinity. Whereas the first play rewards Tamburlaine's hypermasculine conquest with a wife and a burgeoning empire, the sequel strips him of both and details his inability to maintain all that he has achieved.

Tipping Points: Fatherhood and Unsustainable Masculinity

Marlowe's sequel, though still rife with great spectacles of glory, battle, and pillaging, is the story of Tamburlaine's devolvement. Picking up years later, *Tamburlaine II* features his three sons, Calyphas, Amyras, and Celebinus, who in addition to furthering Tamburlaine's arc, serve as opportunities to test the Scythian shepherd's rhetoric of war and shed light on how

[5] Seeing as he falls ill only 15 lines later, many readers and scholars alike assume that in challenging Mahomet, Tamburlaine brings about the wrath of gods. This is far from the only reading of his illness, but it is nevertheless worth considering.

Tamburlaine believes men should be raised and function in society. Tamburlaine suffers an internal conflict in *Part II* surrounding the upbringing of his sons. The entire family isn't seen together in until the fourth scene of the play—within their first scene together, Tamburlaine sets the tone by sulking about the quality of his offspring, or rather, the quality of their masculine militarism. He laments that "their looks are amorous, not martial as the sons of Tamburlaine" (1.4.21-22). "Not martial" implies that the boys lack a certain soldierly quality, and the footnotes provided in *Christopher Marlowe: Four Plays* define amorous as "loving, gentle" (Gibbons 115). The connotation of "gentle" is likely what worries Tamburlaine so, as it is in direct conflict with his conquering dogma and overreaching personality. In her article analyzing the unsustainable father-son relationships of *Tamburlaine II,* renaissance theorist Carolyn Williams clarifies the many energies of this moment, stating that:

> [Tamburlaine's] own masculinity is in question. He is forced to consider two appalling alternatives: either he is incapable of siring properly masculine sons, or his wife, unsatisfied by his own efforts, has sought fulfillment elsewhere. It is a measure of distress and disgust at any sign of effeminacy in his offspring that he appears to prefer the latter possibility. (Williams 58)

As Williams concludes, the stakes could not be higher for Tamburlaine. In his own words, each son (but Calyphas, specifically) is a "bastardly boy, sprung from some coward's loins" (Part II, 1.4.69). Though Tamburlaine doesn't truly believe that Zenocrate has been unfaithful (1.4.34), he nevertheless refers to his children as bastards, perhaps suggesting that he *wishes* she indeed had been. The mere fact that he would fantasize his beloved wife and the mother of his heirs to

do wrong by him is astounding[6], and only speaks to how deeply shaken he is as a father, warrior, and man. Burnett offers another perspective on this moment, and perhaps the two layer on each other. He interprets Tamburlaine's disappointment as stemming from the fact that the reality of them as *his* son's, carrying his lineage, "undermines his individualistic conception of himself as unique, single" (Burnett 37). Burnett explains that this means that "the three sons he fathers signal the 'grotesque' re-emerging and Tamburlaine becoming multiple, heterogeneous … the sons are personified as the other; they are alien to Tamburlaine who refuses to admit that his body has become pluralized and incomplete" (Burnett 37). Perhaps this explains why Tamburlaine is so distraught at the boys' appearances and subsequently hell-bent on instilling himself within them—they are embodied extensions of him, in the very literal sense that his bodily fluids were necessary for their conception. He aligned his body with the grotesque and the risk outweighed the reward; in multiplying himself, Tamburlaine gives into the impulses of the grotesque body, which invokes the image of lowly commoner and other undesirables. In making the decision to Tamburlaine to once more debase himself after working so hard to elevate his status, he logically would want his sons to be perfect heirs. He is quite clear on what that implies: "my royal chair of state shall be advanced, / And he that means to place himself therein / Must be armed wade up to the chin in blood" (Part II, 1.4.82-84).

Unfortunately for Tamburlaine, these insecurities do not easily resolve themselves. Calyphas in particular challenges Tamburlaine's pre-conceived requirements for manhood, as well as his father's patience. Before ultimately electing to kill his son, Tamburlaine spends nearly every interaction with the boy urging him to be more militant, more masculine, and

[6] Especially given all the lengths he goes to in order to claim her as his wife. As a violent man who uses his wife to mediate his own masculinity, Tamburlaine would be *furious* should she be unfaithful and would likely kill anyone involved.

always insinuating the two to be one and the same. It is Zenocrate's passing that catalyzes Tamburlaine's need to fortify his sons' masculinity; whereas before he was disappointed, he is after her death obsessed. As his three sons speak of the tears they've cried and the sorrow they bear, Tamburlaine dictates they must cease, and return to what he believes more manly passions. The loss of the feminine Zenocrate is an opportunity for Tamburlaine to pick up the slack and eradicate any hints of effeminacy he suspects she instilled in his kin, his future warriors. When his sons weep for their mother, he circumvents their energy back into war, endeavoring to train "soldiers, and worthy sons of Tamburlaine the Great" (3.3.91-92). In this quote, Tamburlaine affirms his belief that to be a man, his worthy son, is to be militarized. He begins his lengthy speech by beseeching his grieving sons:

> But now my boys, leave off, and list to me,
> That mean to teach you the rudiments of war:
> I'll have you learn to sleep upon the ground,
> March in your armour thorough watery fens,
> Sustain the scorching heat and freezing cold,
> Hunger and thirst, right adjuncts of the war. (3.2.53-58)

Tamburlaine's word choice is noteworthy in this instance, in that he describes these "rudiments" of war as tied to bodily phenomena; the sensations of touch, heat, cold, hunger, and thirst are how he chooses to foreground the experience of soldierhood, implying that a warrior should be attuned to these physical sensations *and* that war is best understood by embodied means. Only Calyphas protests, arguing "my lord, but this is dangerous to be done—we may be slain or wounded ere we learn" (3.3.93-94). Tamburlaine responds with biting anger: "villain, art thou the son of Tamburlaine / And fear'st to die, or with a curtle-axe / To hew thy flesh and make a

gaping wound" (3.2.95-97)? Tamburlaine's response to his son's insolence speaks to his own philosophy of honor and masculinity. It's telling that his first instinct is to chastise his son's reluctance toward bodily harm, in that such an inclination recalls Tamburlaine's position as a violent force and an unwavering warrior from the previous play. Enduring and inflicting bodily harm is Tamburlaine's passion and prerogative in *Tamburlaine I*—not even grief distracts him from this. In fact, it motivates his mourning; though he laments the loss of Zenocrate's love, he also bemoans the fact that he is arguably down one spoil of war. He externalizes this pain in a hyper-militant way as well, by setting her birthplace ablaze and proclaiming: "death and destruction to th'inhabitants" (Part II, 3.2.5). After she dies, his empire and his young sons, upon which he must instill his same murderous drive, are all that's left. The fact that he cannot easily impart his brand of masculinity upon all of his sons, and furthermore the dishonor that is having an effeminate son such as Calyphas, are both direct affronts to him as a father and as a man, affronts which can in turn serve to destabilize his power as a conqueror. He thus must take to more drastic and desperate means to get through to his boys, and convince them that embodied warriorhood is the pinnacle of masculinity and thus is ideal. Tamburlaine elects to cut his arm, proclaiming "now I look like a solider, and this wound / As great a grace and majesty to me, as if a chair of gold enamellèd" (3.2.117-118). This is a crucial instance in which Tamburlaine insinuates that soldierhood, and by extension masculinity, is located within the physical body. As his arm begins to bleed, he states that it makes him visually akin to a solider, implying that it is not simply the *desire* to fight, but the mortal wounds sustained in battle that prove and reaffirm the genre of militant manhood that he means to exude and to instill within his young. In Butlerian terms, the desire to fight is the "sex," and the blood/wounds the "gender," or cultural experience performed and displayed to the eyes of onlookers and oneself.

Tamburlaine's motivational self-injury persuades only two of his sons. Amyras and Celebinus eagerly don their father's mentality and ache to please him, while Calyphas, however, remains unchanged in his desire to abstain from battle. Of course for Tamburlaine, who equates proper manhood with violence, this mindset is a crime against masculinity of the highest degree. Calyphas' motive for pacifism does not stem from altruism, as it is not a hatred of violence that consumes him but rather a fear of unnecessary injury. He reasons

> should I go and kill a thousand men,
> I were as soon rewarded with a shot
> And sooner far than he that never fights.
> And should I go and do nor harm nor good,
> I might have harm, which all the good I have
> Joined with my father's crown would never cure. (Part II, 4.1.52-57)

Tamburlaine is motivated by the promise of gore, glory, and the spoils of war, while Calyphas is more pragmatic, believing it wise that his performance of masculinity is rooted in reason, self-preservation, and pleasure. As he states in the excerpt, he cannot strive simply for glory like his father; wherein Tamburlaine merely hungers for more, Calyphas believes said spoils to be worthless if it is at the cost of his health. Ironically, the motivating factor in his refusal to fight are the battlefield's threat of injury or death, which he unwisely finds more damning than his father's wrath, seeing as it kills him just as ruthlessly. When Calyphas threatens his father with what Tamburlaine labels effeminacy and dishonor upon his name, Tamburlaine in turn threatens his son with bodily harm, all the while foreshadowing the provocative filicide. "Hold him and cleave him too, or I'll cleave thee," he threatens Calyphas in act one of *Tamburlaine II*,

normalizing threats against his son's life should he not kill his enemies to perform violent masculinity in the same vein as his father (Part II, 1.4.104).

At every possible moment, Tamburlaine imparts upon his sons the belief that to be masculine is to be a solider, and to be a solider is to maim and to bleed. He operates under a fundamentally embodied perception of masculinity; to be a warrior, the pinnacle of masculinity, is to welcome bodily harm during battle. This further incorporates the physical body with masculinity, in that according to Tamburlaine, a man proves his manhood by wagering his very existence on the battlefield. Masculinity is not simply a state of personhood, but something reaffirmed by wounds upon the physical human form. By the logic of the plays, to embody manhood is to *sacrifice* one's body in the name *of* that very same manhood; it is a very literal understanding of embodiment. Furthermore, masculinity is expressed through the man's ability to *impart* wounds upon another, his willingness to give and to take blood. In a last-ditch attempt to restore what he perceives as the manhood that Calyphas' very being robs him of, Tamburlaine expresses his own militant hypermasculinity by dragging the boy from his tent and making a very vocal show of stabbing him. Even when handling the aftermath of his son's death, a death taken with his own blade, Marlowe chooses to prostrate Tamburlaine as an unwavering warrior. He insults his son one final time by ordering the Turkish concubines to "bury this effeminate brat; / For not a common soldier shall defile / His manly fingers with so faint a boy" (4.1.161-163). Tamburlaine again situates masculinity within the physical body by likening mere contact with Calyphas akin to a contamination. In his very next breath, he demands the concubines be brought to his tent, likely with intent to reaffirm his heterosexual masculinity and cleanse himself of any remaining effeminate residue left by his son. He means to reaffirm his status, but perhaps he also dishonors beloved Zenocrate as he copulates with the very concubines who just buried

her close son.[7] The drastic decision to put down his own child is perhaps a site of catastrophe for Tamburlaine's character, or an instance in which he takes his conquest too far and toes into irredeemable waters. Williams offers some insight into Marlowe's authorial backcloth and the early modern audience reaction:

> However inadequate Calyphas might appear, the question remains, is Tamburlaine justified in killing him? In classical times, fathers have a legal right to kill or expose their children. In Renaissance Christendom, however, such practices were defined as murder. But Tamburlaine was no Christian.[8] In any case, it is doubtful whether many audience members would have paused to consider these issues, since Marlowe was making such a powerful appeal to the prevailing dread of effeminacy. The political dimension was also important: as an absolute ruler, Tamburlaine was morally obliged to do whatever he could to save his country from the prospect of being ruled by an unworthy prince. Killing Calyphas could be seen as a service to the state. (Williams 75)

Williams suggests here that *Tamburlaine II* does not merely display a Tamburlainian theory of masculinity, but perhaps parallels an early modern notion of it as well, wherein male sex must be proven through brash and honorable acts, such as eliminating a threat to one's power or rule. Nevertheless, she argues that while Marlowe may well mean to glorify Tamburlaine's hypermasculinity (especially in *Part II*, which was born of popular demand for more of

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[7] Calyphas often mentions favoring his mother, even going so far as to ask Tamburlaine to stay with her: "while my brothers follow arms, my lord, / Let me accompany my gracious mother" (Part II, 1.4.65-66). Though he's attempting to evade combat, these lines do suggest an inclination toward Zenocrate, and a closeness that she reciprocates within this scene.

[8] Though he does at times seem to sympathize with them over the Turks. "[I] will first subdue the Turk, and then enlarge [free] / Those Christian captives which you keep as slaves, / burdening their bodies with your heavy chains," he scolds (Part I, 3.3.46-48). This is perhaps Marlowe seeping in; an "enemy of my enemy is my friend" situation. It matters less to an early modern audience whether Tamburlaine is Christian as much as it does whether or not he also shares in their general distrust of Turkish people.

Tamburlaine's conquering escapades), he in fact exposes the unsustainability of such reckless pursuits: "at its heroic, savage, and faintly ridiculous extreme, manly virtue is destructive to itself and others" (Williams 77). Masculinity is consistently understood through embodied means, with each act of repetition increasing in gravity and extravagance. Although it is a state of mind, it is carried through the soldier's blood and expressed on the battlefield; it is something worth fighting for and dying for, and by the very act of fighting and dying is it proven. It is peculiar then that Tamburlaine, the plays' most hypermasculine solider, who both sheds the blood of his enemies and his own, the pinnacle of militant manhood, succumbs to illness and dies a pedestrian, perhaps insufficiently masculine, death.

Choleric Masculinity and the Danger of Embodiment

Tamburlaine II concludes with the titular figure's demise; this great warrior dies not in the heat of battle, as would seem fitting, but instead of illness. To complicate his death even further, Tamburlaine's illness strikes immediately after he challenges Mahomet, perhaps suggesting a divine intervention despite almost two plays worth of absconded deities. Questions of religion are not the only ones raised by the Scythian's untimely death, however; the nature of Tamburlaine's illness also has complex implications in regard to how the play constructs his embodied masculinity. In *Part I*, Tamburlaine famously references the four humors: "nature that framed us of four elements / Warring within our breasts for regiment" (2.7.18-19). In his text regarding soldiers' desires in *Tamburlaine I* and *II,* Alan Shepard expresses his belief that Tamburlaine is arguing that the four elements "not only authorize but demand the sort of aspiration that leaves others defeated, wounded, or dead." He concludes that "by directing elements at war within his breast toward the universe at large, [Tamburlaine] renders self-destructive energies beneficial: they spur him on to his glorious identity as world conqueror"

(Shepard 736). This "aspiration" that Shepard cites is perhaps best translated through the nuanced field of humoral theory, as humoral theory accounts for both the "energies" Tamburlaine wrestles with and the masculine way in which he presents himself and his conquest. These four elements (earth, water, air, and fire) that Tamburlaine cites as "warring" within humans correspond with the medieval and early modern concept of a body ruled by four humors (black bile, phlegm, blood, and yellow bile). Earth was associated with the body's production of black bile, was said to invoke a cold and dry aura, and was termed a melancholic temperament. Water corresponded with phlegm, cold and wet conditions, and a person of this humor was said to be phlegmatic. Air paralleled the blood, was likened to hot and wet climates, and made a person sanguine. Finally, fire was matched with yellow bile, derived from hot and dry climates, and people under this inclination were said to be choleric. Early moderns allowed for a fluidity in the distinctions between the four elements and the four humors, such that these temperaments had connections to nature, bodies, and personalities.

A theorist who can shed significant light on the influence and cultural importance of humoral theory is Gail Kern Paster. In her book, *Humoring the Body,* she explains that:

> Behaviors were understood as the expression of the interaction of the four qualities, because behaviors were understood to be—at least in part—an expression of the four humors. The forces of cold, hot, wet, and dry constituted the material basis of any living creature's characteristic appraisals of and responses to its immediate environment; they altered the character of a body's substances and, by doing so, organized its ability to act or even to think … The young warrior's choler gave him impulsiveness and the capacity for rage; phlegm helped to produce his cowardly opposite's lethargy and was responsible for the general inconstancy of women. Youth was hot and moist, age cold and dry; men

> as a sex were hotter and drier than women[9] … for early moderns, emotions flood the body not metaphorically but literally, as the humors course through the bloodstream carrying choler, melancholy, blood, and phlegm … (Paster 13-14).

As Paster suggests in her introduction, the reach of the humors is rather extensive in both the early modern body as well as early modern culture. The fact that the humors within each individual responded to the environment as well as their own state of being suggests an overall malleability of the physical form, similar to the one described in the grotesque/classical body dichotomy. This depiction of the human body as porous and transformative complicates Tamburlaine's rhetoric surrounding the figure of the solider. If the solider is subject to changes of fluids within his own body, including blood (which is understood as paramount to his masculinity and warriorhood), then what's to say that his militarized masculinity is not also tentative and conditional? What's to say that an imbalance of the humors can't translate to an imbalance of bodily health? Tamburlaine attempts to frame the loss of blood as a virtue of the battle, in that it reaffirms masculinity (which he idolizes), yet it is this loss of blood that may also *weaken* masculinity through humoral imbalances (which are to be avoided).

Though Tamburlaine's speech describes the humors as constantly struggling against one another, which is considered normal, his actions over the two plays suggest that he's experiencing an excess of one in particular. In her article "Tamburlaine: The Choleric Man," Carroll Camden Jr. close-reads Tamburlaine's character against the stock understanding of the choleric man: warlike, prodigal, hasty, and passionate (especially when angry or in regards to violence). She concludes Tamburlaine to be "an admirable portrait of a man in his own humour,"

[9] As mentioned above when discussing the one-sex model.

citing Marlowe's authorial prowess as responsible for the just depiction of choleric personalities (Camden 435). The choleric personality is also the hottest and driest, thus the most masculine according to Paster's research into early modern beliefs. Humoral theory often operates like a positive feedback loop: Tamburlaine's wrath could be due to an excess of yellow bile, but his own inclination toward militarism (and all the anger, violence, and gluttonous spoils that come with it) could *also* be causing his body to produce more yellow bile in response. Even his location could affect his humoral disposition, as Paster explains: "over all these individual qualities arched the defining humoral attributes of geographic latitude—the cold that gave northern peoples their valor, hardiness, and slow-wittedness; the heat that gave southerners their sagacity and quickness of response" (Paster 14). As a conqueror, Tamburlaine is constantly changing location. In addition to this, Marlowe's English audiences may have ascribed a humoral composition onto this protagonist based on his Scythian origins early on in the plot; as a learned man, it's reasonable that Marlowe would consider the impact of humoralism and geohumoralism (humoral makeups as impacted by climate, location, and/or ethnicity) when writing *Tamburlaine I* and *II.* Nevertheless, Tamburlaine is a near perfect definition of what it means to be choleric. While his humoral composition is at times an asset to his conquest, in that it embellishes his rage and passion, it is this excess of heat and dryness that drags him toward the grave.

"Your veins are full of accidental heat / Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried" a physician tells a dying Tamburlaine in the final scene of *Part II* (5.3.84-85). This blood, the same blood that marked Tamburlaine a solider when he sliced his arm two acts ago, is now weakening him beyond repair. Paster warns "an imbalance of humors causes bodily disease" (Paster 14). Given all the evidence that Tamburlaine is a supremely choleric man (and thus imbalanced), it is

within reason to speculate that this sudden illness is the result of a fatal overabundance of the qualities associated with the militarized masculinity that Tamburlaine wants so badly for himself and his sons. Though fever seems to befall him quite suddenly, Tamburlaine's humoral imbalance builds and builds over the course of the two plays as he reaffirms, recreates, and performs his masculinity through a pattern of violence and domination worsening until it achieves catastrophic peaks. Though his choler does have the power to fortify his mercenary pursuits, his level of cruelty and thirst for blood cannot be satiated and teeters on a very dangerous edge. His hypermasculine temperament instills a God complex[10] within him, prompting him to utter such grisly, entitled lines as "when the sky shall wax as red as blood, / It shall be said I made it red myself, / To make me think of naught but blood and war" (Part I, 4.2.53-55). His extreme devotion to masculinity and soldier culture is what motivates his attempts to dominate his wife's very personhood, burn multiple cities (either from his own temperamental fits of rage or to make cruel examples of those who wish to defy him), and to murder his own son. If this isn't already crossing a line, Tamburlaine also dares to try to overthrow God, an unthinkable affront in such pre-secular times. Across these two plays, Marlowe pens an overreacher who must top his every violent reaction with another one, lest his character arc waver or the audience grow bored; it is the perfect breeding ground for an imbalance of the humors, especially as Tamburlaine loses the softer comforts of his life, namely Zenocrate. When introducing the humors, Paster informs that "clear judgement and prudent action required free flow of clear fluids in the brain, but melancholy or choler altered and darkened them" (Paster 13). Though Tamburlaine is not burdened by dimmed wits, nor is he

[10] This also complicates his expressions of masculinity, or rather, conflicts with some of his actions. How is masculinity to be embodied by Tamburlaine, who repeatedly likens himself to Jove, when most religious figures are said to beyond the needs/constraints/baseness of the physical human form? It is somewhat paradoxical.

slow to act, his choler does alter and "darken" him as *Part I* and *II* progress. Part of the objective of studying the humors and the subsequent medical practices based on the field was to maintain a balance of the humoral fluids, or at the very least promote some form of bodily sustainability. Though natural for the humors to ebb and flow with time, place, and emotion, one humor habitually dominating the others indicated and/or ignited an unwellness of body and mind. Despite Tamburlaine's assurance of his own power and insistence that his philosophy of equating masculinity with war is righteous and solid, the abundance of masculine energy he harbors and preaches is a weakness that masquerades as warrior's virtue.

Though Tamburlaine believes himself to be abiding by an honorable code of masculinity, this choler-driven manhood only serves to take lives, including his own. Not only is Tamburlaine's masculinity not rigid or absolute (in that an imbalance of humors or a feminine son can strengthen or challenge it), nor does it fortify his military pursuits without consequence. Without limits, this dryness and heat that fuel his perilous rage also pollutes his soldierly blood. Tamburlaine, though celebrated in his passing, does not and can not die a hero's death in battle, for his heroic masculinity transcends all logical boundary and robs him of a fitting end. Despite the physician's warning, Marlowe's overreacher lives up to his title and exerts himself beyond reason; Tamburlaine cannot resist the need to return to the fray of war, and dominate one final time, further demonstrating the lengths to which he will go to actualize his masculinity and maintain the repetition of gender performativity. The glory is fleeting. This last, faltering attempt to maintain the status quo of unsustainable masculinity acts as the straw that breaks the overreacher's back. The battle debilitates Tamburlaine in that it "spends" the last of his "martial strength," such that he may fight no more (Part II, 5.3.119). As he perishes, he repeats himself in his laments: "and shall I die and this unconquerèd?" he asks, hinting at both the untimely aspect

of his demise as well as his own perhaps subconscious knowledge that he *is* leaving behind land unconquered, and thus is not a perfect specimen of solider or man[11] (Part II, 5.3. 150, 158). In what is perhaps the largest possible insult to his schema, warrior's way of life, and unfinished empire, Tamburlaine succumbs to his self-imposed illness, dying a feeble and civilian death. What is a fitting death? The trope of the hypermasculine war hero creates a paradox—it's unfitting that Tamburlaine die in a way that doesn't involve battle, yet he also is perhaps too strong and god-like to even be killed by another person. This masculinity sets up expectations that cannot be actualized, in that for Tamburlaine to *truly,* be the "scourge of God," the epitome of militarized masculinity and breathing proof that it's indeed a righteous code to live by, he would need to actually be a God or genuinely invincible. And he simply is not. Striving to be a God or invincible is what does him in. It is his own overzealous tendencies combined with his choleric nature that cause his sickness, the very pursuit of masculinity barring him from achieving the soldierly, masculine honor of either dying in battle or old and prosperous. The damning power of unsustainable, unchecked aggression and choleric masculinity is the only force in these plays more destructive and vengeful than Tamburlaine himself, and thus it is his only logical killer.

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[11] Whether he is outright acknowledging it or not, in stating this Tamburlaine admits a weakness of sorts, and/or his own internalized instability of gender. If he was unsuccessful in conquering all the land he wanted, what is to say he didn't also fail in his performance of masculinity, as the two are so closely connected in his mind?

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